

Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY TOKYO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6358

INFO USLO PEKING IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY SEOUL

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PEKING FOR SECRETARY'S PARTY

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SUBJ: TANAKA'S RESIGNATION SPARKS LDP SUCCESSION STRUGGLE

REF: TOKYO 15294

SUMMARY : PRIME MINISTER TANAKA'S RESIGNATION NOV 26
PLUNGED THE RULING LDP INTO A MAJOR SUCCESSION STRUGGLE. WHILE
PAYING LIP SERVICE TO THE IDEAL OF SELECTING TANAKA'S
SUCCESSOR BY DISCUSSION AND CONSENSUS, CANDIDATES FOR THE SUCCESSION
ARE PREPARING FOR A SHOWDOWN PARTY ELECTION WHICH IS SCHEDULED
TO TAKE PLACE DECEMBER 10. A NEW PRIME MINISTER AND NEW GOVERNMENT
ARE EXPECTED TO EMERGE SHORTLY THEREAFTER. END SUMMARY.

1. PRIME MINISTER TANAKA'S FORMAL RESIGNATION AS LDP PRESIDENT
NOV 26 AND HIS ANNOUNCEMENT AT A CABINET MEETING THE SAME
DAY OF HIS INTENTION TO RELINQUISH THE PRIME MINISTERSHIP WAS
THE SIGNAL FOR A MAJOR INTERNAL DEBATE WITHIN THE RULING
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LDP ON HOW A SUCCESSOR IS TO BE CHOSEN.IMMEDIATELY

AFTER TANAKA'S RESIGNATION WAS SUBMITTED TO THE PARTY EXECUTIVE, LDP VICE PRESIDENT SHIINA CALLED A MEETING OF TOP PARTY LEADERS INCLUDING ALL FACTION HEADS TO DELIBERATE THE QUESTION OF CHOOSING TANAKA'S SUCCESSOR. THE MEETING RECOMMENDED THAT THIS QUESTION SHOULD BE RESOLVED BY THE PARTY EXECUTIVE AFTER THE VIEWS OF THE WHOLE PARTY HAD BEEN THOROUGHLY CANVASSED. IT WAS DECIDED THAT SECRETARY GENERAL NIKAI DO WOULD UNDERTAKE TO MEET SEPARATELY WITH EACH OF THE FACTION HEADS AND OTHER IMPORTANT LDP LEADERS TO ASCERTAIN THEIR VIEWS, WHILE SHIINA WOULD MEET WITH GROUPS OF THE PARTY RANK AND FILE. NIKAI DO IS TO REPORT THE OUTCOME OF HIS MEETINGS TO SHIINA WHO WILL TRY TO COORDINATE THE VIEWS.

2. THE SERIES OF MEETINGS WHICH BEGAN TUESDAY AFTERNOON WHEN NIKAI DO CALLED ON FUKUDA AND MIKI IS EXPECTED TO TAKE AT LEAST THREE DAYS. BOTH FUKUDA AND MIKI REPORTEDLY TOLD NIKAI DO THAT THEY WOULD INSIST ON THE CHOICE OF TANAKA'S SUCCESSOR BEING MADE "THE CLEAN WAY" THROUGH CONSULTATIONS RATHER THAN THROUGH A "DIRTY" PARTY ELECTION. NIKAI DO IS SLATED TO CONFER TODAY AND THURSDAY WITH OHIRA, NAKASONE, LEADERS OF THE SO-CALLED "NEUTRAL FACTIONS" (FUNADA, MIZUTA, ISHII), AND SUCH PARTY ELDERS AS SHIGERU HORI AND FORMER PRIME MINISTER SATO. ALL OF THE ABOVE HAVE PUBLICLY ENDORSED THE IDEA THAT THE NEXT PARTY LEADER SHOULD BE CHOSEN ON THE BASIS OF A PARTY CONSENSUS. EVEN FINANCE MINISTER OHIRA WHO FAVORS A PARTY ELECTION, WAS CONSTRAINED TO TELL THE PRESS TUESDAY THAT HE BELIEVED THE SELECTION OF TANAKA'S SUCCESSOR SHOULD BE DETERMINED THROUGH TALKS AMONG THE LDP LEADERSHIP WITH THE WILL OF THE ENTIRE PARTY TAKEN FULLY INTO CONSIDERATION. HOWEVER, DESPITE THIS APPARENTLY UNANIMOUS AGREEMENT ON PRINCIPLE, MOST OBSERVERS ARE SKEPTICAL THAT A DECISION THROUGH CONSULTATION AND CONSENSUS CAN BE ACHIEVED SINCE THE RIVALRY BETWEEN THE TWO LEADING CONTENDERS, FUKUDA AND OHIRA, IS SO INTENSE. WHILE THEORETICALLY THE ALTERNATIVE EXISTS THAT SHOULD A DEADLOCK DEVELOP, IT MIGHT BE RESOLVED BY SELECTING A RESPECTED PARTY LEADER (E.G., SHIINA, LOWER HOUSE SPEAKER MAEO, SHIGERU HORI, OR UPPER HOUSE PRESIDENT KONO) TO SERVE AS INTERIM PRIME MINISTER UNTIL THE NEXT REGULAR PARTY CONVENTION IS HELD, FEW REGARD THIS AS A SERIOUS POSSIBILITY. THE MOST LIKELY PROSPECT IS THAT A PARTY ELECTION WILL HAVE TO BE HELD TO DECIDE THE SUCCESSION QUESTION.

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3. ALTHOUGH AT PRESENT THE LDP EXECUTIVE IS CONCENTRATING ON DECIDING THE METHOD FOR CHOOSING TANAKA'S SUCCESSOR, WE BELIEVE THAT THE CURRENT EFFORT TO ARRIVE AT A CONSENSUS IS LARGELY RITUALISTIC, AND THAT MOST OF THE PARTY LEADERS, INCLUDING FUKUDA AND MIKI, ASSUME THAT AN ELECTION CONTEST IS INEVITABLE AND ARE ACTING ON THAT ASSUMPTION. ADVANCE PREPARATIONS ARE UNDER WAY. THE LDP HAS ALREADY SET DEC 10 AS THE

DATE FOR A SPECIAL CONVENTION TO ELECT THE PARTY PRESIDENT WHO WILL THEN BE FORMALLY ELECTED PRIME MINISTER BY THE DIET WHICH IS NOW SCHEDULED TO MEET IN EXTRAORDINARY SESSION ON DEC 11. SINCE PARTY REGULATIONS REQUIRE THAT CANDIDATES IN A PARTY PRESIDENTIAL RACE MUST DECLARE THEIR CANDIDACIES TEN DAYS IN ADVANCE OF THE ELECTION, PROSPECTIVE CONTENDERS IN THE DEC 10 ELECTION WILL HAVE TO DECLARE THEMSELVES BY NOV 30. ONCE THIS STAGE IS REACHED AND AN AGREEMENT ON THE SUCCESSION HAS NOT BEEN ARRIVED AT BY OTHER MEANS, MOST OBSERVERS AGREE, IT WILL BE DIFFICULT NOT TO GO THROUGH WITH AN ELECTION.

4. INDICATIONS STILL ARE THAT FOUR MAIN CANDIDATES--OHIRA, FUKUDA, MIKI AND NAKASONE--WILL INITIALLY PLACE THEMSELVES IN COMPETITION FOR THE PARTY PRESIDENCY. (WE ARE TOLD BY YOHEI KONO'S OFFICE THAT A GROUP OF YOUNGER DIETMEN ARE MULLING THE IDEA OF PUTTING KONO FORWARD AS A REFORM CANDIDATE LARGELY AS A GESTURE OF PROTEST AGAINST THE DOMINANT CANDIDATES WHOM THEY BELIEVE ARE TARRED WITH THE SAME BRUSH THAT SOILED TANAKA'S REPUTATION.) IT IS QUITE CLEAR, HOWEVER, THAT THE CONTEST IS REALLY BETWEEN OHIRA AND FUKUDA WHO WILL FIGHT IT OUT ON THE RUN-OFF SECOND BALLOT.

5. WE BELIEVE THE ODDS SO FAR FAVOR OHIRA, WHO ENJOYS A SOLID CORE OF SUPPORT MADE UP OF HIS OWN AND TANAKA'S FACTIONS. FUKUDA, HIS LEADING RIVAL, IS HANDICAPPED BY DIVISIONS WITHIN HIS CAMP AND THE RELUCTANCE OF SOME MIKI ADHERENTS TO JOIN FORCES WITH HIM. SOME OBSERVERS BELIEVE, HOWEVER, THAT OHIRA MAY HAVE EMERGED AS THE FRONT RUNNER TOO SOON AND THAT FUKUDA'S DELAYING TACTICS, I.E., HIS INSISTENCE ON FULL INTRA-PARTY DISCUSSION AND CONSENSUS, MAY BE EFFECTIVE IN CUTTING DOWN OHIRA'S LEAD AND THAT BY ELECTION TIME THE ODDS COULD BECOME MORE EVEN. ALL OBSERVERS AGREE THAT THE NAKASONE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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FACTION WILL PLAY AN IMPORTANT SWING ROLE IN THE ELECTIONS.
HODGSON

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